

Everybody is a star

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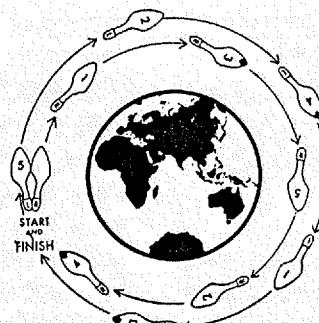
Disconaut AAA - Association of Autonomous Astronauts

‘Take a dancing flight’

Exactly 30 years after NASA launched the Apollo space programme, Disconaut AAA has unveiled its own Dionysus Programme.

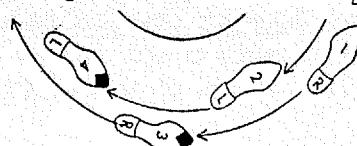
When Apollo 1 caught fire on the launch pad in 1967 it marked the start of the US government's biggest ever space effort. But why Apollo? If pagan deities was the name of the game there were plenty of others to choose from. To answer this we have to turn to Fred Nietzsche, 19th century German philosopher and dance enthusiast.

In the *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche identified two antagonistic cultural tendencies with the Greek gods Apollo and Dionysus. Apollo was associated with restraint, control, order and rationality. The rituals of Dionysus on the other hand involved music, passion, wine, intoxication, and the dissolving of boundaries.



As part of the military industrial complex, seeking to extend the control of the imperial order through the conquest of space, NASA's programme could only be the Apollonian. The Dionysus Programme has been launched in direct opposition to Apollo and its successors, to put into practice Disconaut AAA's mission to explore the potential of dance cultures for the exploration of space.

The starting point for the Dionysus Programme is Nietzsche's description of "the glowing life of the Dionysian revellers": "In song and in dance man [sic]



expresses himself as a member of a higher community; he has forgotten how to walk and speak; he is about to take a dancing flight into the air... He feels himself a god, he himself now walks about enchanted, in ecstasy... He is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art". Phew, all this without MDMA.

Disconaut AAA are attempting to apply this insight into the links between dance, ecstasy and flight as we leave the twentieth century. For some years experiments have been carried out in a global network of underground laboratories of pleasure. We can now report some of our preliminary findings:

- The Dionysus Programme has accumulated extensive evidence of near-flight experiences on the dancefloor. Participants typically report sensations of 'rushing', of accelerating velocity, of the body tracing a line of flight and of leaving behind 'the real world' and establishing a direct connection with the wider universe. There are clear parallels here with the effects on the body and the euphoric feelings of escaping gravity

associated with 'lift off' by more traditional means.

- In the Dionysus Programme we have tried to break the tyranny of liquid-fuel rocket propulsion and to identify alternative fuel sources and means of transport. In the process we have experimented with a range of easily ingested chemicals, some of them derived from plants, others artificially manufactured. These substances have

contributed some invaluable insights and certainly have a role, particularly in maintaining the stamina needed for long flights. However we have to report that several of our experimental human probes which were successfully blasted beyond the atmosphere with chemical propulsion quickly crashed down to earth and vanished without trace, while others are now drifting aimlessly in space circumscribing ever decreasing circles around their own navels.

- the Dionysus Programme has conducted a whole range of tests with extremely high tempo electronic sounds.



The Vostok spacecraft

Our hypothesis was that a continual acceleration in beats per minute would enable us to reach earth's escape velocity and take off. Unfortunately after prolonged uninterrupted exposure to these tests the ship began to break up and several participants showed signs of exhaustion and in some cases nausea. Future experiments will attempt to reduce the risk of side effects by introducing greater variety and rhythmic complexity.

- Ill-fitting space suits have been an ongoing problem in the Dionysus Programme. A major difficulty has been the rigid masculine character armour which even some potential astronauts seem unable to discard. Dance cultures provide a space where it is possible to escape the confines of a fixed identity and explore a range of subjectivities and possibilities. Sadly a lot of men in particular seem afraid to appear as anything other than cool, serious and controlled. Clearly this is incompatible with the flexibility required in space. Disconaut AAA are developing fun fur and sequin space suits to help overcome this.

The present efforts of the Dionysus Programme are geared towards the Dreamtime project, through which AAA groups around the world are imagining what life will be like in autonomous communities in space. Dance settings provide a unique opportunity for collective dreaming, not the passive dreams of sleep but the visions of the lived body in perfect motion.

Here we are not only able to think about life in space, but to feel what it will be like to live in an autonomous community. Nietzsche described this sensation: "Under the charm of the Dionysian not only is the union between man and man [and woman] reaffirmed, but Nature which has become estranged, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her prodigal son, man.... Now the slave is free; now all the stubborn, hostile barriers, which necessity, caprice or 'shameless fashion' have erected between man and man, are broken down.. Each one feels himself not only united, reconciled, blended with his neighbour, but all as one with him".

By creating autonomous zones in our own parties on earth we can create conditions that prefigure autonomous communities in space. To do this we have to neutralize the negative effects of various black holes which suck energy out of dance cultures, such as commercial promoters and the police. This will be the focus of the next stage of the Dionysus Programme.

Spice in space

"When you go and see a careers officer," ponders Mel C, "and you sit down and say, "I want to be a spaceman", instead of responding 'Go study astrophysics', they go, 'Yeah, but what do you really want to do?' That is so wrong" (Spice Girls, *Guardian*, May 1997)

Stay up forever

In 'Voyage to the Moon' (1649), Savinien de Cyrano de Bergerac described an attempt to reach the Moon by tying bottles of dew to the body. The idea was that when the Sun came out, the dew would rise, taking the body with it. On the face of it, this looks unlikely but the nocturnal nature of the Dionysus Programme should make it comparatively easy to test. We will need:

- a large green open space for dew maximisation;
- proximity to a site of astro-magical significance at a summer solstice (when the sun's energy is at its height);
- several thousand people prepared to stay up all night and still have the energy to fly at dawn;
- at least one sound system.

After a night of dancing, participants will roll in the long grass, covering their bodies in a fine suit of dew. They will then join hands and dance in a circle as the sun rises, waiting to take off.

Stonehenge on June 21st has been chosen as the ideal location. Unfortunately there are indications that the state will attempt to sabotage the Dionysus Programme by seeking to prevent this experiment, so all potential astronauts are warned to be ready to defend themselves.

Disconaut AAA

The Association of Autonomous Astronauts is a non-hierarchical network of local, community-based space exploration programmes. Dreamtime is upon us, the second annual report of the AAA is available for £3.00 from Inner City AAA, BM Jed, London WC1N 3XX.

Everybody is a star! is the newsletter of Disconaut AAA (c/o Practical History, 121 Railton Rd, London SE24). Issue one is still available with articles on Disco, Ibiza and the Moon. If you want a copy send an SAE.



In issue No.1 we outlined the links between dance music, radical utopianism and space exploration. We have since become aware of other publications interested in these connections.

- Ego magazine (80a St Augustines Road, London NW1 9RP) includes an article Space is the Place which considers funky futurism in the work of Herbie Hancock, Juan Atkins, the Jedi Knights and many others.
- Rickey Vincent's excellent history Funk: the music, the people and the rhythm of the one (New York, 1996) devotes a whole section to George Clinton and "The metaphysics of P: the Mothership Connection"